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ABSTRACT

By the first decade of the twentieth century, libraries were collecting pictures, post cards, clippings, recordings, music rolls, and stereographs. Circulation of these materials was often restricted, however. A number of progressive librarians stressed the acceptance of nonprinted materials as complementary to the book medium to the library function. Films were not usually included in these early media collections. The American Library Association (ALA) recognized the importance of film quite early. Audiovisual librarianship was introduced to the ALA structure by 1924. A number of programs were sponsored by the association to attract interested librarians, but many of the ALA recommendations for expanded library utilization of the new medium were not implemented. By the 1940's, committed staff and funds were available to the ALA to conduct a number of studies of the use of film and to establish working committees within the organization. A 22-reference bibliography is appended to the history. (KB)

AUDIOVISUAL IN LIBRARIES -- THE PAST

by

Evelyn G. Clement

Paper presented at the ALA Conference,
ISAD Audiovisual Section Program,
Monday, July 19, 1976, 2:00-4:00 p.m.
"Audiovisual in Libraries -- Past, Present, Future"

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. My assignment for this session on AV in Libraries -- Past, Present, and Future is to deal with our past, to give you an overview of the development and beginnings of audiovisual librarianship. In this overview, I intend to tell you something about what libraries collected and circulated, and how the librarians felt about these things. Then I will review some of what librarians were doing about audio-visual librarianship in their roles as ALA members. Finally, I will try to identify some of the factors which either encouraged or hindered the development of audiovisual libraries and librarianship.

First of all, I must say that I will avoid the recitation of a number of "firsts." The examples I mention are simply early examples. I am quite certain that if I were to state emphatically that the first library collection of apples was in Peacock Junction in 1899, one of you would point out to me promptly that it was indeed in Johnson's Corner one year earlier. However, I may safely say that during the first fifteen to twenty years of this century, there were a number of libraries, especially in our larger cities, where could be found collections of pictures, photographs, post cards, clippings, recordings, music rolls, and stereographs. We lagged only slightly behind available technology in adopting new formats into our library collections.

It seems that we have always -- we book librarians -- experienced some ambivalence about our multimedia collections. I am reminded of an old family story about one of my uncles who experienced some ambivalence toward a neighbor's large airedale. Intellectually, he knew that the dog was friendly, a potential pl[illegible]te. But, at close range, emotion would

take over, and his tentative "here doggie, here doggie" was followed by a desperately sincere "go away horsie!" We very early accepted the notion that these "things" are very like books, that they are information in another format. But, when it came to putting them into libraries, we often looked more closely, and with suspicion, at the differences rather than at the major similarity. We collected (by purchase or gift), but we would put elaborate restrictions on their use, strain mightily on decisions such as housing, shelving, and you all know something about the long struggle over cataloging and classification methods. Nevertheless, in spite of the flaws and imperfections of some of the recently invented media, and also in spite of the solid book orientation of librarians' training and experience, librarians were interested in audiovisual media, and libraries did begin to collect them and circulate them to the public.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the school systems in St. Louis and in Reading, Pennsylvania, established museums, containing photographs, stereoscopic pictures, and lantern slides, in order to provide instructional material to the schools. Melvil Dewey supervised a vast collection of pictures and of slides for distribution to the New York state schools, and wrote that what we call books have no exclusive right to the space on our library shelves. He thought that if a picture provided the answer required, it ought to be shelved right along with the books. The Kansas City, Missouri, public library circulated music rolls for the player piano in about 1914 and the Kern County California library used stereographs, lantern slides, and music records in the library before 1919. The Chicago school system began an instructional film library in 1917. In the editorial columns of Public Libraries in 1914, someone said that "it would seem to be quite as legitimate for a library to possess

good music rolls or discs...to be lent...with as great propriety as books."

The St. Paul, Minnesota, library did just that -- almost. They began their record collection in 1913, with a gift from a local citizen, and by 1915 had 93 records. But they did not circulate them to just anyone who walked in off the street. They did circulate them to schools and to various clubs in the city. The Springfield, Massachusetts, public library staff worried somewhat about possible damage to the records in their collection sometime before 1923, but decided to go ahead with a generous lending plan. The first record was broken by the chief librarian himself, who promptly established a precedent by paying for his mishap.

Record collections also existed in some academic libraries. The Smith College library began in 1923 with a group of records filed in one small cabinet. This collection later grew to the extent that the librarians found it necessary to devise a system of labels, special envelopes for the records, some cataloging and classification rules, and some specially built cabinets. However, the records were mainly for the use of students who were assigned to listen and the circulation amounted to a sort of "reserve" system. On the other hand, the collection at Antioch College developed a few years later with more emphasis on the recreational interests of its students. A member of the class of 1928 purchased a Victrola for $245.00 (a pretty good sum for those days) and started the custom of Sunday afternoon concerts for his fellow students. These were frequently out of doors, under the trees (possible because, of course, the machine ran when one wound it up, rather than depending on a source of electricity.) A collection was taken up at the end of each concert to help pay for the

machine. When the class of '28 considered what gift it would leave the college, the members decided to establish a fund to generally encourage music appreciation among students. A portion of this fund was to be used to underwrite these concerts and could be used to purchase records. These were to be for all the students to enjoy, not just those who were studying music formally. The records circulated for three days, with an overdue fine of 5¢ a day. Records were, of course, carefully examined when they were returned, and there was a charge for damage or replacement. An additional incentive for the students to further enjoy the music was provided by a policy which allowed replacement of these recordings after 100 circulations. Those records which were retired were sold at about ¼ the original price at the college book store, thus allowing the students to build their own personal collections at bargain prices.

The Williams College library in Massachusetts also circulated records to students for a three-day period. This collection was begun with a "Christmas gift" of music from Paul Whiteman in 1936. While some of these were for "reserve" use, the major use was for individual recreation. A unique feature of this collection was that it included Bach to Stravinsky, plus the latest "swing" and included about 270 jazz recordings. This library reported very good experience with circulation -- only about a dozen breaks in 2,256 circulations in 6 months, and five students were "black-listed" for repeated carelessness. Williams made no provision for in-house listening, so these were all out of the library circulations.

Full access to recordings, even in the late thirties, was by no means the rule. The Minneapolis public library circulated those records that were donated to the library, but restricted the use of those they purchased to a sound proof room on the premises. A patron could reserve

the use of the room for 30 minutes, or longer if no one else was waiting. Even there, however, one might experience some breakage. One patron put a record on the chair while he put another on the turntable -- and then sat upon the first -- an expensive few minutes. The library's philosophy stated at the time now seems fairly advanced: Why save these materials for future generations while denying access or use to the present patron?

It sometimes appears to me that the restatement, the frequent restatement, of this philosophy by our leading audiovisual pioneers throughout our history has been as much a sort of whistling in the dark as it has been instruction or encouragement to novices in the field. Two such statements appeared in print about 1940. M. Lanning Shane observed that audiovisual aids are themselves books of a kind, and that libraries offering audiovisual service would really be stimulating the wider use of books. Of course this was a "special type of book," and the librarian, with a slight addition to his professional training, was the logical person to offer this service. Then, almost a statement amounting to "besides, we MUST do this," when he said that these aids were too valuable and too widely used to be ignored. In other words, if we do not participate, we will just be passed by.

Mary Townes said that she could understand the hesitancy to readily accept these materials in libraries. "Such an array of scientific aids to learning confronts the preserver of knowledge that it is no wonder that most librarians have clung to the book collection as their primary, if not their only concern." For those of us who found this array too confusing, she offered this rationalization: Their use, like books, is either to preserve the record of civilization or to aid in the dissemination of ideas.

Later, Reynard Swank, addressing an audiovisual workshop in 1963, recognized that he was speaking to audiovisual librarians rather than to the unconverted book librarian, but he still found it necessary to give what was by that time (and may still be) the standard pep talk. "Instead of emphasizing the mechanical separateness of the various media -- instead of imagining conflicts between them -- we should, I think, concern ourselves with the content and educational purposes of them. If we think in terms of content and purpose, we will unhesitatingly relate books with films, slides, or recordings whenever they supplement each other, any place in the library. We will consciously use them together." An additional caveat he offered was that we ought to guard against comparing poor media with the best books. In fairness, or for balance, perhaps he should have added "and vice versa."

In "The Information Film" Gloria Waldron warned us against what might be a natural conclusion to our "just like books" philosophy: Don't use films (or other formats, for that matter) as bait to get your patrons to read books. She cited one horrible example. Having opened a branch library in a low-income, low-educational level, largely first generation immigrant neighborhood, a public library discovered that these people were not very good potential reading patrons. They proposed, therefore, to offer six months of extensive film showings, discussions -- entertainment -- in order to bring the people into the library. At the end of this six months, they assumed that the neighbors would be "good library patrons," would be coming to the library for books, and the film programs would be discontinued.

In speaking of some of these early media collections in libraries, I have not mentioned much about films. There are several reasons for this, and please realize that I am probably greatly oversimplifying the actual situation. First of all, in most of the early statements of the "just like books" philosophy, librarians were usually speaking of the materials with which they were directly familiar, those which they had collected in their own libraries .... and generally this did not include films. One early writer who proposed that libraries ought to collect and distribute motion pictures actually based his argument on the premise that films were indeed different from books. Orrin G. Cocks in 1914 said that the need was greater for film libraries than for book libraries. Books, as individual items,might easily be purchased by readers, but films, as collective items, are a public advantage.

A second reason that films were not generally included in these early library media collections was based on a technological problem. Until 1923, film stock was always highly flammable, causing either a real storage problem or a dangerous situation -- or both -- for libraries which were not designed or constructed specifically to handle them. And until the 1930s we did not have a truly portable 16mm projector. Third, probably a logical outgrowth of both my first and second reasons, film collections tended to be developed separately -- either in school systems, commercial establishments, or university extension departments -- rather than in libraries. Another probable reason might have been the cost of providing film service, which became technically possible just at the onset of the great depression.

Let me shift now to some discussion of what audiovisual librarians were doing during this early period in their roles as ALA members, for

the film library service philosophy seems to be intertwined with this thread of my story.

Audiovisual librarianship was introduced into the organizational framework of the American Library Association in 1924. Even in our first half century when the organizational structure of ALA was far more simple than it is today, a committee dealing with some aspect of librarianship was usually established at the request of a group of librarians who were interested in studying that aspect. That was not the case in this instance. Even though libraries, a great many libraries, had collections of media before 1924, and even though individual librarians had written about these collections and about how they felt about them, there is no evidence of the existence of even a nucleus of membership interest or support in any ALA unit dealing with any aspect of media before 1924. The proposal which was the genesis of formal ALA audiovisual activity came from outside the association.

Ben Howe, a "representative of the motion picture industry" -- I'd like to know more about him, but that is all I've been able to find out -- a representative of the motion picture industry suggested to the Council of the American Library Association that libraries should be the principal agencies for the distribution of educational films and the centers of information about industrial and entertainment films. He proposed that films be selected and cataloged with annotations and that this information be distributed to libraries on catalog cards. His plan also called for ALA to establish film storage facilities and film printing laboratories at a central point, with a number of libraries to serve as regional distribution centers. This was a pretty far out proposal for ALA to receive in 1924

but Council did not throw him out, nor did it denounce him as a lunatic. It referred the matter to the Executive Board -- passed the buck -- for "the appointment of a committee if the Board thinks that advisable." Now, I've heard it said that the best way to keep a small group of radicals from making trouble for the association is to let them form a committee. In other words, let them talk to each other instead of directing their energy toward the disruption of the on-going work of the association. That does not appear to have been the case here. Mr. Howe caught the attention and the interest of Carl H. Milam, ALA Secretary. Mr. Milam said: "There is grown up a great institution, -- moving pictures -- which is affecting the lives of millions of Americans in one way or another. It concerns both education and recreation, the same field, in other words, as the libraries. No general effort has been made to define the relations between libraries and moving-pictures. It (seems) advisable to the Executive Board that there should now be appointed a committee to look into this matter." He thought there were three ideas which the committee, which the ALA president authorized, ought to examine.

1. The advisability of experimenting with the distribution of educational films through libraries;

2. The relations which do or should exist between a public library and the local moving picture theaters;

3. The service which librarians can and should render in the preparation of annotated subject lists of educational (especially non-commercial) films.

And so a Committee on Relations Between Libraries and Moving Pictures was appointed. This committee produced its report in 1925, consisting of three recommendations which generally reflected the objectives of Howe's proposal.

1. That the public libraries in the larger cities be urged to establish and maintain, in connection with their information service, indexes to the agencies from which moving picture films may be obtained for educational and recreational purposes.

2. That an effort be made to induce a selected number of public libraries (chosen with some regard for geographical divisions) to assume the functions of collecting and distributing films for the use of schools, clubs, and other organizations in their respective regional areas.

3. That in view of the amount of detail involved in the task of developing and sustaining a consecutive program of cooperation between the public libraries and the moving picture producers, the services of an executive clerk, working at the headquarters of the American Library Association or at the office of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc., should be secured. It is believed that in the event that the ALA is unable to finance this proposal, the necessary funds can be obtained elsewhere.

It will probably not surprise you to learn that this revolutionary proposal was not implemented. I find no evidence that anyone violently objected to it. It may be that the time was not right. My personal conclusion is that without a membership base of support, there was simply no vehicle for discussion beyond the five committee members, no method of effective dissemination of the ideas it contained, and no concerted effort was possible to obtain the organizational support -- both monetary and manpower -- necessary for implementation.

The committee continued to exist, but it made no report for the next two years. The new committee members recognized "the importance of visual instruction, the great possibilities of the film in adult education, the

challenge to libraries to conserve and distribute films, and the work which lies just ahead in the indexing of films and especially in cataloging the historical, geographical and otherwise educational elements in film originally produced without any direct educational purpose."

When the original objective for which the committee was organized appeared difficult, if not impossible, to reach, the committee did what we often find an organized group doing. Rather than disband, they selected an alternate, more easily obtainable objective. They focused on that portion of Mr. Milam's statement which mentioned relations between libraries and the motion picture industry -- the local theaters. In 1929, a subcommittee for motion picture previewing was established, which functioned almost completely independent of the parent committee until 1969. Members of the subcommittee previewed commercial films, prepared reviews which were utilized along with those prepared by volunteer members of a number of other national organizations for publication in the "green sheet."

Also following along with this interest in 'tying up' with the motion picture industry, the ALA committee generated some interest and activity which resulted in what might best be termed 'mutual publicity' arrangements between local public libraries and local theaters. Librarians prepared bibliographies on subjects related to the films to be shown in the theaters. The film industry then printed bookmarks which were distributed at the library and at the theater. In addition, the theater would often show a slide or two between features advertising the benefits and pleasure to be derived from a visit to the local library.

Apparently finding that this was the most the committee might be able to accomplish with library/motion picture relationships, the members requested that ALA allow them a broader scope of concern, which would include such other media such as lantern slides, stereopticon reproductions, microscopic equipment, educational exhibits, and museum material. The committee agreed that it was still interested in film, but during the 1930s, the topic of discussion at the committee meetings was most often that media with which the current chairman happened to work. The committee began to hold round table discussions and to sponsor exhibits at the annual conference. In other words, they really began missionary work to attract librarians who might be interested, to educate them, and to develop an interested membership base.

One such round table program particularly amused me. Anyone who has had to arrange for a panel discussion at conference will understand the problem encountered by the committee chairman in 1933. She wanted to hold a discussion about library exhibits. What do you do first? Well, you know a couple of people who will have something to offer. Then, you look for libraries with a reputation of having done something outstanding related to the subject and invite the person in charge to atke a place on the panel. That this is not always a safe method was evident in this session. Gretta Smith called first on the director of the Louisville Public Library to discuss his library exhibit, because he was in charge of that most expansive form of an exhibit -- a museum. The gentleman began, "Our museum is located in the basement. We inherited it from another institution and the present building was planned to house it. It is all right." When another panelist interjected that the Louisville director seemed to be

of two minds about his museum and that, perhaps, even considered it to be a white elephant, the gentleman from Louisville indicated that it ought to be in a separate building, that it ought not to be linked with a library unless it could be supported adequately, that it "eats up the library budget" and that perhaps if he threatened to close it, the people who liked it so much might be willing to support it. Fortunately other members of the panel began to describe their more modest exhibits a bit more enthusiastically, and the program moved away from this awkward beginning.

In 1934, while the committee's program revolved almost entirely around a discussion slides, the business meeting of the committee returned once more to some of the early concerns. A resolution was sent to the ALA Committee on National Planning, which once more recommended the establishment of regional centers, demonstration centers for audio-visual aids. This time, while it was a more modest proposal than the one presented earlier, the suggestion had at least two strong points which the earlier one lacked: First, it concerned the collection of more than one medium, and second, it was addressed to a particular organized group within ALA with some discretion over the establishment of priorities for the work of the organization. Of course you know that this proposal also was not implemented, but the National Plan for Libraries did acknowledge that "libraries should assume responsibility for the preservation and use of visual materials and mechanical substitutes for the printed page."

Some of our predecessors had some pretty good ideas; some of them

still sound pretty good today. But they were not implemented. What does it take to get these good ideas off the ground in a large organization? Well, one thing it takes is people -- a lot of people, a group large enough to reach an informed opinion, a group large enough to have some clout when it speaks. It also takes a small group of people. These must be people who have a strong personal interest in the crusade who also happen to hold a position -- either staff or organization position -- which has some stature, some authority in the organization. After about 1935 we began to find these people.

First of all, we began to develop a working relationship with adult education. Here we found a larger membership base, an organized group which could be encouraged to forward our objectives. The individuals we found here were people like Mary Utopia Rothrock, who served as chairman of the Visual Methods Committee for several years; John Chancellor, the adult education specialist on the ALA headquarters staff; and Carl H. Milam, ALA executive secretary. Through these people we found access to a second very necessary ingredient -- money.

When Miss Rothrock accepted the chairmanship of the Visual Methods Committee in 1938, it was "with the understanding that the committee is to study the question of what if any responsibility libraries have for collecting, preserving, and distributing educational and possibly recreational films." Now, it may seem that this same question had really been asked (and possibly even answered) many years before. However, this time the climate was far more hospitable for the asking and the answering to have some action result. A grant was requested from the Rockefeller Foundation. In April 1940, ALA received $5,500 "to encourage library

experimentation in the handling of educational films, especially in public libraries, but also in school, college, and other libraries; to cooperate with such libraries and to facilitate the exchange of information between them; to devise uniform methods for recording the experience and to encourage their use; and to report from time to time on the experiments." A Joint Committee on Educational Films and Libraries was formed with representatives of the American Film Center, the Association of School Film Libraries, the Motion Picture Project of the American Council on Education, and the American Library Association. With Mary U. Rothrock as its chairman, the committee proposed that a study be made by a librarian investigator of present film handling and use by libraries, of the need for further library effort in this area, and of the ways in which libraries could cooperate with and effectively implement existing state and other film lending libraries. Gerald D. McDonald, New York public library, made the study and published the results in February 1942, not exactly a propitious time in which to propose implementation of his recommendations. However, the onset of World War II did allow one demonstration program to spread the use of film programs to many public libraries. In 1941, through the support of Secretary Milam, Alice Bryan's proposal to establish a film forums program in support of civilian morale was funded by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Again a joint committee was formed, rather than utilizing the already established ALA committee. There were bibliographies and discussion guides prepared for librarians participating in the project, and in 1941, a demonstration and discussion of film forum techniques.

Looking ahead to the postwar years, Miss Rothrock prepared a proposal for submission to the Rockefeller Foundation which would continue and further the expansion of library film service which had followed the McDonald report and the film forums program. She saw a need for inservice training for film workers in libraries, for 35 to 40 pilot operations in libraries, and the support of a librarian film specialist on the ALA headquarters staff. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? After several attempts to attract foundation support had failed, ALA was finally successful in obtaining a grant of $27,000 from the Carnegie Corporation. This was "for a two-year program to provide for film advisory service to help libraries establish film lending service." Patricia Blair Cory became the film advisor in June 1947, and with a two-year extension of the project, remained on the staff at headquarters for four years. This was of tremendous value not only to the individual libraries which were able to initiate film programs which had not been possible previously, but to the audiovisual committee work as well. It was really only during this program that the audiovisual committee had a person on the staff whose major concern was directly connected with the work of the committee. This is not to take away one bit from the marvelous assistance provided to the committee later by Grace Stevenson or by Paul Brawley in their roles as staff liaison to the committee. However, their major assignments at headquarters were not directly related to the committee's work, and the amount of time and effort they both contributed were entirely dependent on their individual, personal interest in audiovisual work.

At the suggestion of Carl Milam, the former Visual Methods Committee was merged in 1940 with the former Radio Broadcasting Committee to form the Audiovisual Committee. In 1948, the committee was made a board, a status which was supposed to allow for a subcommittee structure which would allow more aspects of audiovisual librarianship to be considered than would be possible under a committee. As a matter of record, we did accomplish many good things during the board period; there were several notable preconference institutes and a good deal of publicity, general missionary work. But, the board was really no more able to cope with the broad spectrum of audiovisual librarianship than was the committee which preceded it. And here I feel I would be remiss if I did not point out some of our failings.

Some of our problems were organizational, but some of them were more related to just "getting along with other people." We saw a need and tried (sometimes successfully) to cooperate with other national organizations which had some of the same professional concerns. But we managed, too frequently, to cause misunderstandings and hard feelings in our dealings with, for instance, DAVI. Within the ALA family, sometimes our extreme concern for jurisdictional boundaries caused not only hard feelings, but extreme delays in accomplishing what almost all of us saw as desirable to accomplish. An elitist attitude exhibited at times by the board tended to alienate some of our ALA groups. And this tended to foster the development of fragmentation of audiovisual work within the association. Interest groups in ALA would reason that if the board did not see fit to consider their interests, they should form a committee to do so. And they did.

Although elevation of the Audiovisual Committee to board status in

1948 appeared to enhance its opportunity to achieve its goals, in practice the board did not fully utilize the organizational advantage it provided. The board either failed to consider or dealt ineffectively with television, radio, recordings, filmstrips, and slides -- all of which libraries were dealing with and for which they wanted assistance and leadership from the association. We were neither attentive nor responsive to divisional audiovisual interests. There was often an undercurrent of disdain in the board's attitude toward ideas or proposals which came from outside the board. We were only moderately successful in efforts to establish liaison, communication, and cooperation with other national associations. And our Audiovisual Round Table, our only attempt to provide a vehicle for membership discussion and communication among members, particularly those members who felt that the board did not adequately represent the full range of opinion and experience of audiovisual librarians, was eliminated in the reorganization of 1956.

To end on a positive note, some mention should be made of our strongest assets during this early period. First, and most important, creative, flexible, responsive librarians and library administrators, who not only followed but were willing to lead in the development of more-than-books library collections. Second, hard working ALA members who were willing to be missionaries, even when few cared to listen, who went out to beat on the doors of foundations which might be convinced to support the spread of audiovisual librarianship, who willingly served as committee members or chairmen or speakers. Third, those ALA staffers who were willing to listen and to help make a place for us in the organizational structure of the American Library Association.

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